

Setting the Scene



Love That Dog

“I don’t want to,” begins Jack, the narrator of *Love That Dog*. “Can’t do it. / Brain’s empty.” Jack’s story is told as a narrative poem: It chronicles how a boy learns to write but also poignantly illustrates his love for his dog, his growing admiration for words and images, and his relationship with Miss Stretchberry, the teacher who helps him believe he might really have something to say. In a voice that’s sometimes irreverent and always accessible, Sharon Creech explores what makes a poem and what makes a poet, inspiring readers to believe that they can write something that “is really / a poem / really really / and a good poem, too.”

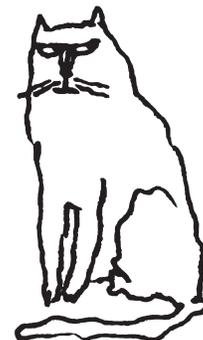


Hate That Cat

Not even a stodgy uncle can put a damper on how Jack feels when he returns to Miss Stretchberry’s class! *Hate That Cat* continues Jack’s story; in this year’s journal, he learns poetic devices, exults in images, and makes clear how much he does not want a replacement for his dog, Sky. Jack also becomes aware of how others, including his mother, perceive poetry and sound, words and rhythms. He makes it his mission to “hear / all the sounds / in the world,” writing them down so that he can share those sounds with others, as well as his love for particular things and—perhaps surprisingly—one particular creature.

Teaching Poetry: Tips for Making Poetry Accessible and Fun for Students

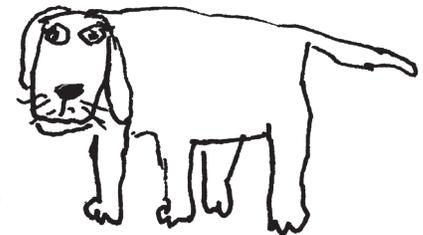
- **Show that it’s okay.** Discuss with your students Jack’s early reactions to poetry and emphasize that it’s all right not to “get” a poem the first time you read it. Ask students to track Jack’s reactions to William Carlos Williams, which go from a total lack of understanding to imitation and homage. Tell students about a poem that you didn’t like at first but that eventually grew on you.
- **Teach useful annotations.** Show your students how physically marking a poem as they read can help them understand it. Helpful symbols to learn might include a question mark (for something that is confusing), an eye (for a striking image), or an ear (for something that sounds good). Encourage students to identify passages in which they can make a connection to themselves, other texts, or the world at large.
- **Feel the rhythm.** Jack learns to tap out the rhythm of a poem; your students will enjoy doing the same. Choose poems with a steady beat and read them aloud, emphasizing the stressed syllables. As an extension, encourage students to investigate the connections between poetry and music. Do their favorite musical artists use meter in their lyrics? What about rhyme or alliteration?
- **Read out loud.** Share a short poem with your students each morning. Vary the poems that you read to show students that poetry can get them to laugh, help them picture faraway places, remind them of their own lives, or just sound good “beat-beat-beating” in their ears.
- **Provide journal time.** Jack uses his journal to react to the poems he is reading and to experiment with his own writing. Provide students with a poetry journal and regularly scheduled writing time, starting with short increments and building up to longer periods. Use your responses to ask guiding questions and direct students to other poems that may inspire.



& HATE THAT CAT

Understanding Poetry: Terms and Concepts

- **Alliteration**—the repetition of a beginning sound. Examples from *Hate That Cat*: “creepy cats,” “delightful dog.”
- **Assonance**—the repetition of vowel sounds. Examples from *Hate That Cat*: “clasps the crag,” “sea beneath” (from “The Eagle” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson).
- **Consonance**—the repetition of similar sounds, especially consonant sounds, at the end of words. Example from *Love That Dog*: “shaggy straggly.”
- **Imagery**—words an author uses to help the reader visualize and imagine with the senses. Example from *Hate That Cat*: “pouncing with her cactus claws.”
- **Metaphor**—a comparison that suggests that one thing is the same as another; metaphors often use a being verb, like “is” or “was,” to equate the two things. Example from *Hate That Cat*: “The black kitten / is a poet / L E A P I N G / from / line / to / line.”
- **Onomatopoeia**—words that imitate sounds. Examples from *Hate That Cat*: “buzz buzz buzz,” “pop! pop!,” “inkle and trickle.”
- **Rhyme**—two or more words that end with the same sound. Example from *Love That Dog*: “bright” and “night.”
- **Rhythm**—a repeating pattern of sounds and syllables. When Jack uses his fingers to tap “HARD-soft HARD-soft / slow and then faster” in *Hate That Cat*, he is helping his mother feel the rhythm of “The Black Cat” by Christopher Myers.
- **Simile**—a comparison that says that one thing is like another; a simile contains the word “like” or “as.” Example from *Hate That Cat*: “The chair in my room / is like a pleasingly plump momma.”



Discussion Questions

Love That Dog

1. Jack’s beliefs about poetry change throughout the year. What do you believe about poems? What makes something a poem? How are poems different from stories and other kinds of writing?
2. When he’s first learning to write poetry, Jack borrows a lot of ideas from other poets’ works. Why? Does borrowing from others help him to develop his own style? Where do you draw the line between being inspired by someone else and copying his or her work?
3. Jack feels nervous about having his work displayed in the classroom. Why does he want his early poems to be anonymous? How does he expect his classmates to react? Do you ever have a hard time sharing your work? Why?
4. Look back at Jack’s poems about his dog, Sky. How do these poems build on each other? How does Jack reuse his own words, and where can you find lines that were inspired by other poets?
5. Are you at all similar to Jack? Discuss Jack’s growth as a reader and as a writer using quotes from the book. Which one of his statements about poetry most echoes your own feelings?

Hate That Cat

1. Miss Stretchberry tells Jack that alliteration and onomatopoeia can enrich a poem and that “they can also make a poem / sound purple” (p.11). What does she mean? Is a poem sounding purple a good thing? Why does Miss Stretchberry use the word *purple*?
2. Describe how Jack’s feelings about Skitter McKitter and the fat black cat evolve. Why does Jack care about the kitten? How do his feelings for Skitter differ from his feelings for Sky?
3. Jack’s mother doesn’t speak the way he does. How do we, as readers, find out that she’s deaf? What imagery does Jack use to describe her?
4. Jack’s poetry changes when he shares it with his mother. Discuss the things that he does to help her feel the sounds in his words. How does onomatopoeia become more important to Jack as the story progresses?
5. What does Jack appreciate about the poems that Miss Stretchberry introduces him to? What does each poem teach him? Which of the poems at the back of the book is your favorite, and why?

